

to human rights, our Bill of Rights, not only has domestic implications for Americans, but it also has inspired and encouraged countries around the world in their own quest for freedom, democracy, and human rights. Successive American Administrations have recognized our nation's strong national commitment to human rights as a guiding principle and as one of the highest obligations of our nation's foreign policy. The United States has freely accepted our obligation to protect human rights under international law by signing and ratifying various international human rights treaties and covenants. It is also fundamental to any democratic system of government that the public be fully informed about policies directly affecting these most fundamental rights in order for the people to make meaningful decisions with regard to their government and to participate fully in the democratic process. The timely declassification of documents pertaining to human rights violations abroad, therefore, ought to be a paramount obligation of any U.S. government agency.

Second, our nation's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and democracy around the world has led us to make tremendous diplomatic, economic, and military efforts to end systematic human rights violations abroad. The United States government's efforts are supported by numerous American and foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the promotion of human rights and democracy. These efforts would be in vain if we do not do all we can to uncover and legally prosecute those who commit human rights abuses with impunity. Only full investigation of human rights abuses in these areas can really bring about the full accountability needed to develop respect for human rights and to rebuild a peaceful and reconciled civil society after civil conflict.

Third, democracy and human rights can flourish only where information is fully available, and information is essential to the rule of law. Without information and the rule of law, we will see human rights violations and the erosion of democracy. Even in countries where progress has been made, there is danger of regression if full information and the rule of law are not scrupulously enforced.

A country currently facing this danger is Guatemala. As my colleagues may know, just a few weeks ago, three gunmen entered the house of Ronald Ochaeta, the director of the Catholic Church's human rights office. They put a gun to the head of his 4-year old son and left a box with bricks behind. The bricks are an allusion to the assassination of Bishop Gerardi a year ago, who was killed by a brick only days after the Bishop issued his report on human rights violations during the period of the Guatemalan Civil War. The investigation of the Bishop's death has not yet produced any results. In Guatemala recently, President Clinton gave his word that the United States will never forget its obligation to those people whose lives have been affected by our policies, and who are now rightfully seeking the most basic of all information which was not included in the recently released report by the Guatemalan Truth Commission—What happened to their relatives and loved ones, where are their bodies, and which individuals were responsible for the disappearances and deaths?

Mr. Speaker, let me briefly outline the provisions of H.R. 1625:

Our bill specifies that 120 days after enactment of the legislation, each U.S. government

agency shall identify, review and organize all records and documents relating to human rights abuses in Guatemala and Honduras after 1944. The provisions of the legislation would also apply to human rights violations in other areas of the world, but because of the particularly serious problems of Guatemala and Honduras and the reconciliation efforts currently under way there, these two countries these are given particular focus in the bill.

The legislation would apply the declassification procedures of the previously enacted JFK Assassination Records Act to human rights records. This will assure that legitimate National Security concerns are protected, but at the same time it will also assure that human rights documents are given special priority. In order to assure that records are not withheld for trivial reasons, those records which agencies seek to withhold would be reviewed by the Interagency Security Classification Appeals Panel (an organization which was established by Presidential Executive Order 12958) or any entity subsequently established which fulfills the same functions of the Appeals Panel. Our legislation would add two new members to the Appeals Panel (or the entity that replaces it). These two positions would be filled by the President with human rights experts who meet the security requirements for membership on the panel. The President would be required to invite recommendations for these positions from the human rights community.

Mr. Speaker, our legislation is an effort to assure that human rights records and documents—which are essential for the identification and prosecution of individuals involved in gross human rights abuses—are made available to other countries in their pursuit and punishment of human rights violators. At the same time the legislation recognizes and carefully balances the national security and intelligence needs of the United States.

I invite our colleagues in the House to join as cosponsors of this important piece of legislation.

THE TAX FAIRNESS FOR THE STATES ACT OF 1999

HON. PETER J. VISCLOSKEY

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 13, 1999

Mr. VISCLOSKEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of bipartisan legislation that I am introducing with Representatives ISTOOK, SANDLIN, LAHOOD, and 17 of my colleagues. The Tax Fairness for the States Act of 1999 will restore millions of dollars of lost revenue for the states, and establish an incentive program for those Native Americans who play by the rules.

The Supreme Court has continuously upheld the states' power to levy taxes on non-tribal members within Native American Tribal Trust Lands. The problem that remains, however, is the mechanism to collect these taxes. Our bipartisan measure would solve this problem.

The Tax Fairness for the States Act would authorize the Secretary of the Interior to promulgate rules to remove those Native Americans lands from the Tribal Trust on which a retail establishment exists that is not collecting

the proper state excise taxes. This is not a discriminatory piece of tax legislation aimed at harming Native Americans. Rather, it focuses on the collection of excise taxes that, according to the Supreme Court, should have been collected in the first place. This legislation does not affect transactions between tribal members; it would only impact those retail establishments that are not collecting and passing on these legal taxes on non-tribal members.

The Tax Fairness Act would protect the rights of Native Americans by requiring the Secretary of the Interior to promptly notify any tribe that is under investigation for not forwarding applicable state taxes and gives them a chance to respond. This notification would set out the time and manner in which a tribe has to answer the allegations, including a 90-day comment period in which interested parties could submit statements and request a formal hearing before the Department of the Interior. These important provisions will ensure due process for all tribal members.

Furthermore, our legislation contains incentives for tribes who operate establishments in accordance with the law. The Tax Fairness bill awards Native Americans who play by the rules by giving priority among Native American tribes competing for federal grants to those tribes that can certify their compliance with state law.

This measure ensures equity in the process of state taxation. This is not about Native American sovereignty, nor is it about discrimination. This measure will give back the hundreds of millions of dollars that states lose annually because these taxes are not collected. Support this measure, support tax equity for the states.

IN SUPPORT OF NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

HON. JACK QUINN

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 13, 1999

Mr. QUINN. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to rise today on the floor of this House in recognition of National Police Week, which began May 9 and will run through May 15.

As you know, in 1962, President John F. Kennedy signed Public Law 87-726, designating May 15 as Peace Officers' Memorial Day, and the week in which it falls as National Police Week.

During this week, we not only pay tribute to the brave men and women who have given their lives in service to our community, but we show our unending gratitude to the police officers who daily risk their lives for our protection.

It is important that we all know and understand the problems, duties and responsibilities of our police department, and that members of our police department recognize their duty to safeguarding life and property, by protecting them against violence or disorder, and by protecting the innocent against deception and the weak against oppression.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call upon all citizens of Western New York and the Nation, and upon all patriotic, civic, and educational organizations to observe this week as National Police Week, and join in commemoration of